Sua Yoo Toy Box Coffin 2025

What year were you born? Where did you grow up?
What inspired you at a young age?
I was born in 1990 in Korea. I grew up in the suburbs of Illinois and Wisconsin. I was a latchkey kid, and my mom enrolled me in a lot of community dance and craft classes. She also dropped me off at the library while she ran errands. So I had access to a lot of media, alone, from an early age. I would check out craft magazines, YA self help books, Reader's Digest etc from the library when I'm 6-7 years old and then Xerox them at Ace hardware to make little books of the parts I was interested in, like the jokes at the end of each Reader's Digest story. I was obsessed with making miniature furniture and stories of kids under satanic possession. Both obsessions feel very american midwest to me.

Did you have access to comics growing up?
I grew up with libraries that had a great comics section. When I was really young the comics I picked up that made the deepest impression on me were Bone, Elfquest, Bloom County, anything by Rumiko Takahashi. I traced a lot of panels from Ranma 1/2.

What were your favorite cartoons in your youth?
My mom would tape Looney Tunes for me. I loved Speedy Gonzales and Pepe le Pew. We'd also get Sailor Moon dubbed in Korean from the Korean video store.

When did you discover zines? How have you related to sub-culture throughout your life? Did you have a punk phase? or did you ever identify within a scene in your youth?
I probably learned about zines from the older kids who made them. There was a crusty little scene around Swing State, an all-ages hookah bar with a highway on one side and woods on the other side. I just looked it up and it was torn down to make way for a Nissan dealership. They'd have shows.
I was hot for the crust punks because I lived in the middle of the Chicago-Milwaukee crust tour route. I'd meet crusties on the way to Winnipeg. I wasn't a part of that scene, I was just hot for crusties, I'm like 17.
I wore around a Rudimentary Peni patch before ever listening to the band. When I did look it up I was disturbed by how bad they sounded.

I liked electronic based music, probably starting with Polysics when I was 12-13. This was the early 2000s, when being too into the internet was a subculture. There was a culture around ripping music, making and downloading mp3 playlists off blogs like Blogspot and Livejournal.

Midnight Snacks made playlists of glitch, chiptune, techno, which had a big influence on me; hearing Venetian Snares blew my mind. Later on, finding out about Dan Deacon from a playlist blew my mind.

So in retrospect, I could identify with the subculture of internet nerdom. Having internet friends was still pretty rare. This does coincide with when I'm making internet friends who make comics, like Inés Estrada.

What was your relationship with the underground comics scene during the creation of Asian Mysticism and College Girl Mafia?

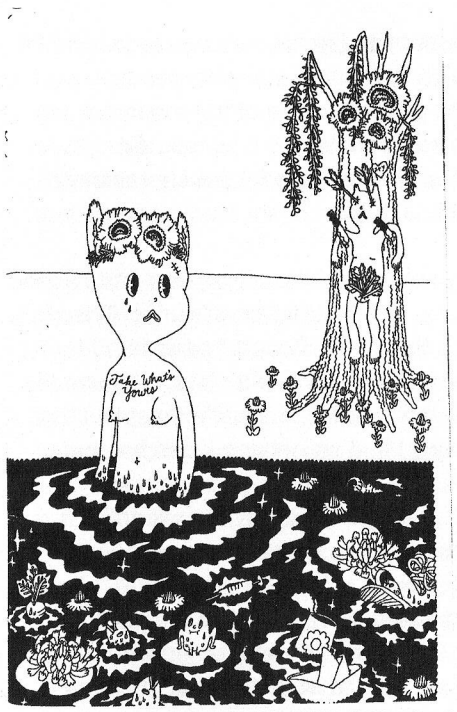
This might sound unbelievable, but I didn't know contemporary art existed before I went to art school, or that there was a distinction between mainstream and underground comics. I got accepted to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with an illustration portfolio and had my reckoning when I took a comics class my freshman year.

I have an earlier zine of yours called Squinty #1, it's dated 2009-2010. It's interesting to see the shift in style from this zine into the two zines we're reprinting. The style of Squinty, though it's unique, somewhat fits in with the broader aesthetic of underground comics of the early 2010s, while Asian Mysticism and College Girl Mafia seem like a full departure from anything being made in the US indie comics scene around this time. What do you remember about Squinty? and do you remember how you published / distributed it?

Squinty is a really freshman year project. I made it while taking Jeremy Tinder's comics class. I'm learning about underground and alt comics. I'm rediscovering Daniel Clowes--"Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron" really freaked me out as a kid--and R. Crumb. There's a grab bag of styles and techniques that I like, so I'm trying everything out and learning what xeroxes well. Staples and Kinkos used to have an employee code that you can type into the copy machine and get unlimited free copies so you could really experiment with how an idea feels when it's a book.

I'm so curious about the development in your style from Squinty to AM & CGM. What is your relationship with Manga and Anime?

AM and CGM were made when I'm being more deliberate about evocation through style. An anime or manga style character in American comics is a sort of golem. It's this really recognizable human shape, but it's a foreign figure, never "American" even when forced to perform americanism. As a reader you're made hyper-aware of the creator's americanness. There was this webcomic called Megatokyo that is a good example of this.



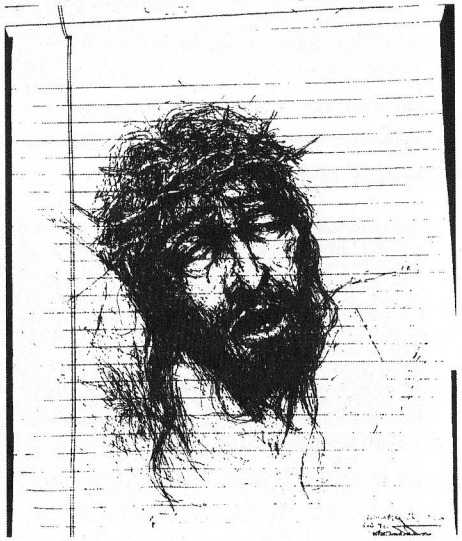
Cover of *Squinty #1* 2009

I WANT TO TEAR YOU OPEN LIKE A MAD DOG, YOU KNOW
I'M SO MAAAD~ DOGGING
THERE'S NO METAPHOR, FOR THIS FEELING, OOOOOHH
IT'S REALLY SIMPLE, WHAT WE'RE DEALING WITH

Squinty #1 page 5

YOU WON!!!!! CLAIM YOUR PRIZE NOW
SEXY NAUGHTY TEENS
ALIVE CAMS
SIGN UP TO CLAIM YOUR PRIZE
SHOOT THE TO WIN FREE PHONE
YOU ARE THE 1,000,000th VISITOR WINNER!!
ARE YOU
FREE FREE FREE
MEET HOT SINGLES IN YOUR AREA
EVER AGAIN

Squinty #1 page 11



Christ drawing 2016

In Asian Mysticism I'm processing featurism and racial caricatures, which I'm struggling with looking at older alt comics, and I'm processing gender plasticity and experimenting with what a general sense of trans-ness is aesthetically. Looking back, it's hard to say whether it's a successful experiment. I was tabling at CAKE and someone asked if the character on the cover of Asian Mysticism was Angelina Jolie.

With College Girl Mafia I'm discovering net art and the art college party scene and I'm hot for net artists and ravers. Like I was hot for crust punks. There's a lot of party fashion in this collection, like the "Pray2Reaper" party in "DJ Paintings" is an actual party that I organized with Priz Tats. I had classmates roam around the party in skimpy anime maid outfits and some people were pissed. I liked tuning things aesthetically so that something looks hot, but doesn't feel so hot. Like in Dog Parable the cute manga girls are golems I created to tell an intimate story without getting crushed by the weight of it. These are supposed to be funnies, after all.

I made my favorite comic "Post-Age" in between Squinty and the ones you're reprinting. It's in a consistent style that sort of merges manga and Tove Jansson, and it's a singular narrative. I wonder what you'd think of it.

On your instagram I found this anecdote from around the time you were working on these comics:
"Facts, i had a pair of victoria secret faux fur mukluk slipper boots that i wore every day for a chicago winter - if you dont know, theyre indoor slippers. So i would put plastic grocery bags over my socks, slip the boots on, and bike 4 miles thru the snow to school and back home. Id wear them on the train and get bullied - im like 22 years old then - because they looked so disgusting Anyway thats my like "grandpa walked 10 miles to work at the mines when he was 9" story."

It's funny how these kinds of life details get embedded in our memory of the work, I found an old listing for Asian Mysticism on the Quimby's website. The description simply says "mangled manga mayhem," this reminded me about the Chicago scene and the vibrant comics community in that city. What is your relationship with Chicago? And do you have any other memories you associate with this era?
I started attending art school in Chicago, one of the best cities in the U.S. for an inspired pedestrian. They didn't lock the hatch to the bridge catwalks, so you could crouch under a bridge while cars drove above you and shit into the river. The pedway system was unparalleled in corporate commuter kitsch.

The school was downtown, which was bustling with office workers, CD hawkers, buskers, tourists, street preachers, students. So not only could you get anywhere by bus, bike, or walking, traveling was a super rich textural and social experience. Then you'd be hit with the subzero winter, when your body refused to go outside so you just sat inside drawing all day. It makes sense that comics would thrive here.

Early 2010s, the music scene in Chicago is incredible. I watch Sasha Go Hard and Katie Got Bandz perform back to back with a hardstyle DJ while the floor buckles underneath the crowd, about to cave into the furniture store downstairs. I scrub feet as a nail tech in the north side, because my mom is a nail tech and she got me a job. My coworker wants to pay me $7,000 for a green card marriage to her boyfriend in Mongolia. That's two years of my rent. I like traveling. I go to Atlanta and discover escorting by working for a week at a brothel. I start taking the Megabus to hang out in Detroit. I go to NYC and ride my first limousine. Looking back, I think the title "College Girl Mafia" reflects my interest in when a bonded group of women engage in something illicit and physically reckless. Like nail techs hacking immigration, brothels, sorority girls on PCP. And I don't think those comics could have been made anywhere other than Chicago, because living was cheap enough that you had time to process all your experiences and make them into experimental zines you traded and gave away for free or cheap.

The first time I saw your work was in a comics anthology put together by Inés Estrada and Ginette Lapalme from 2010. How did you get connected with Inés and Ginette? To me, they are both highly influential figures in the underground comics scene.
Inés and I became internet friends through Livejournal. Inés is a part of a group of comics artists I connected with through Livejournal while I was in high school. I was really inspired by them, like lala (Lauren Albert) and Carly Schmitt. I finally met Inés in person when she was visiting Chicago.
We walked to Food4Less and got beer. Yeah Inés and Ginette are utterly iconic and genuine souls. Their anthology series is a perfect and sweet record of all of us existing at the same time.

There's swipes / references from Betty Boop, Casper, Tiny Toons, and a plethora of other cartoon / pop culture imagery smeared together throughout the pages of these zines, I'm curious how you feel about this pantheon of cartoons and how they spoke to you during the development of these comics?

These characters have their own baggage, and I love that. The american cartoon characters come supercharged with character. Like Boop is saucy, with a good heart, she gets frustrated sometimes when she's trying to do something well. So even when you see her in CGM shoplifting and cursing you already know that she's doing it as a good kid, and that she has a lot of anxiety doing it.

In 2010 I shifted from comics to sculpture, and the characters show up there, too. My senior show included a 4-ft tall sculpture of Calvin from Calvin & Hobbes peeing into a corner, cast in plaster from a mold I milled on the CNC from a 3D model I modeled in Maya. Since the image of Calvin peeing is already a bastardization of Calvin's character, by ripping a panel out of context, I wanted to see what other corruptions incur from each material translation.

Did you grow up with Precious Moments figurines?
Just the illustrations. The first Precious Moments image I saw was the cover of my mom's diary.

I remember a Scream Mask in a video piece? Was there a diamond studded Scream Mask? What's your relationship to the iconic Mask?
Yes, I had the idea to make and sell crystal studded art which didn't really take off (https://www.youtube.com/@tiffanyblueblood4711) I think the mask is really beautiful like a river stone.

I'll admit, I'm not very familiar with Death Grips, but I know that a drawing from Asian Mysticism became the cover of one of their records. How did that come about?
I became friends with Andy online through Youtube, when Youtube had DMs and you could have private dialogue with users, like you can with Instagram now. I must have given him a copy of Asian Mysticism when he came through Chicago.

I'm comparing the drawing in the zine with the art on the album cover, it's curious to me how many details were edited from the original drawing. All tattoos are removed from the figure on the left and the figure on the right is missing their cross necklace and smiley face keychain. This strikes me, because your original drawing is riddled with nuanced signifiers that build a narrative around these characters, and then the album cover version is missing that richness. I'm curious if you remember how these editing decisions were made? or if any details are coming to mind about this process?
The band licensed the drawing and edited it. In the context of the zine, the drawing is me processing power dynamics, immigration, trans-ness, and pop culture. I'm using "processing" instead of illustrating, because it's coming from a young place where I have some intuition that these things are interconnected, but I don't have the life experience to reproduce the connecting pieces. I understand the band's choice to strip the drawing down to the sense of power and domesticity because the other details need the context of the zine to behave symbolically.

Your work has taken many forms over the years, your practice is more expansive than any other artist I can think of: Film maker, sculptor, shoe cobbler, poet, knife designer/manufacturer, T-shirt graphics artist, coder, photographer, and cartoonist. I wanted to ask how narrative plays into the different ways that you work? Do you think of yourself as a storyteller?
I think the throughline is an interest in behavior and characters. And thinking of characters as a collection of behaviors. Then, it's how the shape of an object, like a shoe or a knife, can influence the physical gestures that create certain behaviors, like always leaving your shoelaces untied. Then you have a character that's constantly tripping over your shoelaces and getting into trouble by stumbling into the wrong people. I'm more interested in facilitating a meeting with that character than creating the narrative.

Sometimes when I think of your work, I think about this intense drawing of Jesus that you posted on social media some years ago. Were you raised in a religious setting?
I was really into Christianity as a kid in the same way I was really into satanic possessions, alien abductions, and UFOs. I believed fully because I liked the scary feeling it gave me.

In the last few years you've made some shirt designs for Farmer's Daughter and Online Ceramics, how did those projects come about?
Alix Ross, who founded Farmer's Daughter and co-founded OC, is very convincing!

I'm curious if your creative output will circle back to comics making again? Do you draw regularly?
I have an idea that could work as a comic. It involves a love triangle with a bicycle. But I'd like to try it as a live performance first.
I have phases of keeping a sketchbook. Right now, I keep a notepad on my bedside table where I sketch out an image I dreamt. These will probably become photographs or performances. That's where the bicycle threesome came from, from a dream. The dream drawings do satisfy an urge to sketch.

Recently you had an art show of sculptural works, "2 americns" how did the show come about? and how long had you been working on that body of work? Is there a throughline from the comics we're reprinting to the work you've recently made?

My friend Lev Abramov, who co-runs Niko, saw a sculpture that I had made earlier this year. I started making this series based on a video I took of myself batting my eyelashes in a mug full of beer. I wanted to translate the video into a photo, but I didn't want it to be too humanized. So I created a life-sized doll head out of cast latex and photographed it. Then I made a large freestanding figure with a cast latex head, with hair installed using a tool I saw people on Youtube using to replace plastic Barbie hair with human hair. I used horse hair because I'm interested in its use as a precursor to synthetic stiffeners and fillers. I like considering the natural material that inspired its synthetic counterpart. I have an antique golf ball made of gutta percha, a thermoplastic derived from a rubber tree, and I'd like to melt it down to incorporate it into a sculpture one day.

The sculpture is titled "Foreign Ken" after a photo by Paul McCarthy in the Palm Springs Museum. It shows a decapitated and defiled Ken doll against a bubblegum pink background. I similarly installed Foreign Ken against a wall covered in pinkish-red protective paper used for construction. The timing of your reprint is nice because I can trace the younger interest in deconstructing foreignness to the new work. That deconstruction felt confusing and painful and urgent when it was young so it made sense to express on paper. Now it's something more confident and curious, so it can be addressed in a more permanent form like plaster and rubber.

What are you excited about lately and what are you working on currently?

I moved to Joshua Tree recently and started volunteering at a DIY events center called The Firehouse, and I'm excited to facilitate shows and artmaking for the younger people who come through here. I'm also excited to do more live performances. I've been performing as Luc Breno for the past few years, this guy who wants to write and perform poetry but is too distracted by his desire for his wife. I'm currently working on a butoh-drag performance of a drunk magician.

Supplementary Interview for *Sua Yoo Collected Comics 2011-2013.*
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